DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 267 787 IR 012 155

AUTHOR Randall, James P.
TITLE Evaluating Media Support Services: An Ethnographic Approach.
PUB DATE Jan 86
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (Las Vegas, NV, January 16-21, 1986). For entire proceedings, see IR 012 121.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audiovisual Centers; Educational Media; Ethnography; *Evaluation Methods; Higher Education; Interviews; *Learning Resources Centers; Literature Reviews; Naturalistic Observation; Needs Assessment; *Nursing Education; Qualitative Research; *Research Methodology; Resource Materials
IDENTIFIERS AECT Research and Theory Division Meeting

ABSTRACT

Designed to identify research methodologies suitable for the qualitative evaluation of media support services, this 1-year prototypical study used ethnographic research methods to evaluate media services within a school of nursing. Objectives were established in the areas of needs assessment and evaluation of the condition and context of media services. Data were collected through interviews with faculty; attendance at faculty committee meetings; information observations and interactions with nursing faculty, students, and administrators; observation of the process of media support services; collection of media utilization data; and the establishment and maintenance of both formal and informal contacts with university level media personnel. Media and instructional support needs were identified and classified in four areas: (1) organization, (2) administration, (3) service, and (4) production. Recommendations were developed on the basis of examined conditions relative to the four categories of need, and plans for action and directions for future development emerged from the analysis of qualitative data. A list of references is provided. (Author/JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OERI
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official position or policy.

ED267787

EVALUATING MEDIA SUPPORT SERVICES:

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

By

James P. Randall
Director, Media Services
School of Nursing
Widener University
Chester, Pennsylvania
19013

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Michael Simonson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper Presentation
Research and Theory Division
Association for Educational Communications and Technology
Annual Meeting
Las Vegas, Nevada
January, 1986

IR012155

ABSTRACT

An examination of the evaluation of media services in a school of nursing utilizing qualitative research methodology is presented. Since ethnographic methodology differes significantly from research approaches more commonly used in education, it is important to identify and understand the differences in this alternative approach. This study considers these differences and provides an application of this methodology in the evaluation of media support services within a school of nursing. Pertinent evaluation and ethnographic literature are reviewed to provide a theoretical basis for this discussion.

A one year prototypical study employing ethnographic methodology was undertaken to evaluate media services within a school of nursing. Objectives were established in the areas of needs assessment and evaluation of the condition and context of media services. Data was collected through interviews with and attendance at faculty committee meetings, informal observation and interaction with nursing faculty, students and administrators, observation of the process of media support services, collection of media utilization data and the establishment and maintenance of contact with university level media personnel, both formal and informal.

Media and instructional support needs were identified and classified in four areas. These categories were: (1) Organization, (2) Administration, (3) Service, and (4) Production.

Recommendations are specified on the basis of examined conditions relative to the four categories of need. Plans for action and future development direction emerged from the analysis of qualitative data.

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation of media support services is both assumed and systematically planned for in the on going process of media services management (Erickson, 1968). Moreover, A.E.C.T. (1982) suggests that in addition to quantitative factors, qualitative considerations may be necessary to effectively evaluate specific programs of media support. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify qualitative research methodologies which are suitable for evaluation of media support services. Furthermore, an ethnographic approach is then applied to the evaluation process of media services in a school of nursing.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Three areas of consideration emerge from a review of the evaluation and media support/educational technology literature. The three areas are: (1) Issues of research, (2) Considerations related to the naturalistic paradigm, and (3) Ethnographic methodologies. Issues of research

include considerations of paradigmatic differences, questions of methodology and the resolution of apparent differences.

Paradigmatic differences have been addressed by Guba (1981), Guba and lincoln (1981) and Guba and Lincoln (1982), relative to defining naturalistic inquiry. Essentially for research purposes, paradigms may be viewed as patterns for discovering knowledge. Therefore, different paradigms rest on different philosophical foundations with varying sets of assumptions relative to the research phenomena in question (Donmoyer, 1985;Guba and Lincoln, 1982). Hence, due to differences in world view, varying paradigmatic approaches have in fact, produced a heated debate both philosophically and operationally. Most notably has been the discourse between "rationalistic" and "naturalistic" means of inquiry (Howe, 1985).

Philosophical stances have lead to perceived differences in methodology. Methodological differences, according to Guba (1981) have been viewed in terms of quantitative versus qualitative preferences. However, Guba (1981) further suggests that methodology concerns are better analyzed when viewed in relation to the trustworthiness of the results which those methods yield. Hence, when viewed in relation to aspects of trustworthiness (ie.: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality), questions of validity, reliability and objectivity from a "rationalistic" perspective, may in fact find a commonality of agreement when defined in terms of credibility, dependability and confirmability, from the "naturalistic" perspective.

Moreover, Cook and Reichardt (1979) suggest that a resolution to the "rationalistic"/"naturalistic" debate, on at least the methodological level, is the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods where appropriate. Hence, Guba (1981) and Guba and Lincoln (1982) propose the triangulation of methodology through the collection of data from both perspectives.

The second major area of consideration relative to the literature review, is that of analyzing aspects of the naturalistic paradigm. This analysis may be viewed in terms of the two areas of philosophical assumptions and methodology considerations. There are five areas of philosophical assumption relative to the naturalistic paradigm (Guba, 1981; Guba and Lincoln, 1982). First, Guba (1981) suggests that there are multiple realities which may in fact, be studied holistically. Second, the researcher and object or "respondant" have an interactive relationship, with each influencing the other. Third, generalizations are not possible due to the fact that knowledge is bound both by time and context. Forth, since actions are best explained in terms of the interaction of multiple factors, methods of assessing phenomena are most appropriately determined by the notion of "best fit," relative to a contextual/holistic approach. Fifth, the research endeavor (inquiry) is value bound. These five areas of philosophic assumption impact methodological applications for the practicing evaluation researcher.

Methodological considerations would include a wide variety of data gathering techniques. Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggest a number of techniques, such as interviewing, observation, record analysis and non-verbal cueing behaviors. Moreover, Patton (1980) and Van Maanen (1983)

both address a number of related issues dealing with the application of and collection of data by qualitative methodologies. While quantitative methods as identified by Campbell and Stanley (1963) may also be included in the research design in order to triangulate findings (Cook and Reichardt, 1979). Finally, methods may in fact be determined by the unfolding of the study according to Guba and Lincoln (1982).

Based on the fore going considerations, the utilization of ethnographic methodological approaches appear to be not only useful, but also highly appropriate to the evaluation of media support services, from a qualitative perspective. Wilson (1977) and Fetterman (1984) suggest specific considerations for the use of ethnographic techniques in evaluation research. Accordingly, Shrock (1985) notes that the results of naturalistic studies tend to be process oriented, holistic and personally/politically sensitive.

Therefore, the study reported herein, is that of a one year prototypical study employing ethnographic research methodology from a naturalistic perspective, in order to evaluate media services and to determine areas of need for further development in support for a school of nursing.

METHOD - THE ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

The methodology section of the study includes delineation of the context/institutional setting, as well as data collection activities and data analysis. The delineation of the institutional setting and contextual considerations provide for a higher degree of transferability of results by providing descriptive data which may be compared with other settings and contexts (Guba, 1981). Therefore, this study took place at a four year private university, within its school of nursing. The school of nursing offers a four year baccalaureate program in nursing accredited by the National League for Nursing. Nursing students receive instruction on campus, while gaining related clinical experience at various local health care facilities. An intensive program of individualized auto-tutorial instruction with clinical simulation laboratory experiences predominates the junior and senior levels. Several graduate programs leading to a Master of Science degree in Nursing (M.S.N.) are also offered, as is a course of studies leading to a Doctorate in Nursing Education. Undergraduate enrollment is approximately six hundred with graduate students numbering approximately two hundred and twenty. Combined undergraduate and graduate faculty total approximately fifty five (FTE).

Media support is provided through a specialized nursing media support group for students' individualized instruction, clinical simulation laboratory experiences and several small classrooms within the school of nursing's building space. Classroom support outside of

the nursing building is provided through a campus wide centralized media center. The nursing media support area maintains a collection of nursing related software materials, instructional kits and AV hardware. These materials are housed in a small closet area and are checked out by students and faculty for use in smallgroup viewing rooms located throughout the nursing building space. Instructional kits for clinical simulation laboratory use are checked out and used in the laboratories, located in another part of the nursing building. Staffing consists of one full time supervisor (R.N. with no formal media training), two part time work-study students and a laboratory assistant (part time). Faculty are primarily responsible for instructional activities utilizing this service.

Guba (1981) suggests that by collecting "thick" descriptive data, a higher probability for transfering results to other contexts may be achieved due to the comparison "fit" of contextual description. Therefore, issues of external validity and generalizability are addressed from a naturalistic perspective through the utilization of methods which are appropriate for determining a high degree of transferability.

Data collection activities included a wide variety of ethnographic and naturalistic methods, as well as, quantitative measures. Specific activities included: observation of faculty meetings and committee meetings; structured interviews with faculty, students and administrators; informal observation of instructional activities, both in terms of faculty and student involvement and interaction; examination of faculty/administration generated documents; informal conversations with faculty, students and administrators; observation of the process of media support services; collection of media utilization and evaluation data; and formal interviews and informal conversations with university level media support staff and administrators.

Observation of faculty meetings and committee meetings provided data for log entries. Log entries included any activities, discussion or disclosure relative to media support, as well as, reactions, questions and other social interaction. These data were cross checked with documents generated by the various committees and respective administrators. This activity provided a level of credibility relative to findings (Guba, 1981).

Structured interviews with faculty, students and administrators were conducted. The use of standardized open-ended interviewing techniques (Patton, 1980, p. 202) provided a reduction in bias due to the standardization of questioning for each of the different groups interviewed.

Informal observation of instructional activities yielded interesting responses from both faculty and students in natural contexts and settings.

Examination of faculty and administration generated documents served as references for cross checking observationaldata (Guba, 1981). Primarily, these documents consisted of committee minutes, memo's, annual reports and task force reports to accreditting agencies.

Informal conversations with faculty, students and administrators provided additional data which reinforced observational and interview data (Patton, 1980, p.198).

Observation of the media support process provided log entries which lead to an understanding of logistical problems and processes.

Collection of utilization and evaluation data provided for the triangulation of data from a quantitative perspective (Guba, 1981). This process assisted in the cross checking of data and interpretations established by the qualitative methodologies.

Formal interviews and informal conversations with university level media personnel tended to clarify need areas identified by faculty, students and administrators in the school of nursing. Moreover, this activity provided for peer debriefing experiences for the researcher.

Member checks were provided through the process of combined observation and interviewing of the various population groups involved in the study. This member feedback provided for the possibility of higher levels of credibility (Guba, 1981).

Data analysis emerged from and in conjunction with the data collection. Specific themes relative to needs and development direction for media support services were identified. As related themes emerged, they were checked in terms of source origination and multiple response. As various population group and techniques identified related themes, the themes were then defined in terms of media support need and related direction development. For example, when organizational concerns were expressed by the three groups of faculty, students and administration, the cross checking of these references lead to the emergence of organizational need areas.

RESULTS

Based on the data gained from the variety of methods utilized, a conceptual structure of media support service need categories emerged. Moreover, recommendations specified on the basis of the examined conditions provided a structure for strategy development relative to the need categories.

The conceptual structure of identified needs consisted of four areas. The four categories relative to media support are: (1) Organization, (2) Administration, (3) Service, and (4) Production. Organizational considerations included better organization of distribution of hardware/software materials to faculty and students; structured individualized learning areas; identification of lab practice areas; and establishment of comprehensive indices and inventories for collection holdings.

Administration concerns included staffing, funding and supervisory considerations. Specifically, questions of necessary staffing levels for media/lab support, budgeting process development, oversight of student simulation experience, responsibility for lab supplies and collection maintenance were identified.

Service needs included areas in which media support service would be able to support faculty in the instructional process through the utilization of instructional design, development and evaluation principles and practices. Specific service needs included the following: faculty orientation to the possibilities for media utilization within the instructional process; identification of media users and opinion leaders; continued development of the hardware/software collections; and faculty consultation for instructional design, development and evaluation.

Production needs included specific applications of technology to the instructional process in order to further achieve a broad-based learning environment through the production of materials designed to meet specific learner needs. Specific production needs included: utilization of basic graphics production for media design; video programming applications to instructional tasks, delivery systems and testing strategies; application of computer technology to competency based instructional strategies; and development of graduate level instructional materials.

Recommendations were then developed on the basis of the present contextual condition of media support service need categories. Organizational procedures for the effecient and effective function of media distribution were developed. Administrative recommendations were specified in terms of staffing, budget, supervision, procedural specification and collection maintenance. Role function of media service staff was identified. Service recommendations were developed in terms of instructional support perspective including areas of inservice training, identification of media users/opinion leaders, and consultation for future development endeavors. Production recommendations emerged directly from data yielded from the qualitative methodology.

Staffing considerations evolved from the specification of support recommendations. Moreover, cooperative ventures were identified relative to university level library and media support departments. Channels of communication were identified and formalized.

DISCUSSION

The present one year study sought to identify qualitative methods which would be suitable for the evaluation of media services within specific contexts. Moreover, an ethnographic approach was then applied to the evaluation process of media services in a school of nursing. Categories of media support need then emerged from the activities of data collection and analysis. These need categories provided a basis for developing a structure of recommended development.

The process of evaluation is on going, due to the evolutionary nature of media support bound in space/time contexts. Therefore, this study merely serves as a prototype for an on going evaluation methodology process within the school of nursing. Needs must continue to be identified, strategies implemented and evaluation undertaken.

One must not, in this process lose sight of the central goal of instruction. Therefore, future directions will be shaped by emerging needs and the strategies implemented to meet those needs provided by the continual process of evaluation.

REFERENCES

A.E.C.T. Task Force II, (1982). Standards for College and University Learning Resources Programs. Washington, D.C.: A.E.C.T.

Campbell, D. T. and Stanley, J. C. (1963). Experimental and Quasi-experimental Designs For Research on Teaching. In N. L. Gage (Ed.), Handbook of Research on Teaching. Chicago: Rand, McNally.

Cook, T. D. and Reichardt, C. S. (Eds.) (1979). Qualitative and Quantitative Methods In Evaluation Research. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Donmoyer, R. (1985). The Rescue from Relativism: Two Failed Attempts and an Alternative Strategy. Educational Researcher, 14 (10), 13-20.

Erickson, C. W. H. (1968). Administering Instructional Media Programs. New York: Macmillian.

Fetterman, D. M. (Ed.) (1984). Ethnography In Educational Evaluation. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria For Assessing The Trustworthiness of Naturalistic Inquiries. Educational Communication and Technology Journal, 29 (2), 75-91.

Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). Effective Evaluation: Improving the Usefulness of Evaluation Results Through Responsive and Naturalistic Approaches. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1982). Epistemological and Methodological Bases of Naturalistic Inquiry. Educational Communication and Technology Journal, 30 (4), 233-252.

Howe, K. R. (1985). Two Dogmas of Educational Research. Educational Researcher, 14 (8), 10-18.

Patton, M. Q. (1980). Qualitative Evaluation Methods. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Shrock, S. A. (1985). Faculty Perceptions of Instructional Development and the Success/Failure of an Instructional Development Program: A Naturalistic Study. Educational Communication and Technology Journal, 33 (1), 16-25.

Van Maanen, J. (Ed.) (1983). Qualitative Methodology. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Wilson, S. (1977). The Use of Ethnographic Techniques In Educational Research. Review of Educational Research, 47 (1), 245-265.